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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001121

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PINR PTER KDEM KIRF NI MILITANTS

SUBJECT: ALLEGED AL-QA'IDA THREAT PARALYZES ACTIVITIES IN JOS

REF: 04 ABUJA 1927

Summary

1. Fear and anxiety gripped the citizens of crisis-ridden Plateau State in Nigeria's Middle Belt following an alleged plan by the Al-Qa'ida terrorist group to unleash terror attacks on some parts of the state. Trepidation over the possibility of another religious conflict also became rife following a circulation of inciting leaflets in the state capital of Jos during the week of June 6. The scare crippled commercial and social activities. The fretfulness also extended to some eastern parts of the state like Yelwa-Shendam and Lantang, sites of significant communal violence in the past. Although there was no reports of violence related to the threat, Governor Joshua Dariye, security agents, religious groups, and community leaders took the issue very seriously.

The Threat of "Jihad"

2. Sources from Jos report that during the week in question, an inciting leaflet was widely circulated in many strategic areas of Jos. It claimed that an unknown Muslim organization called the "Islamic Revolution Committee" with alleged links to Al-Qa'ida had concluded plans to carry out a "Jihad" against Christians in the Middle Belt. Moderate Muslims opposed to the objectives of the group would be attacked. The group, according to the flyer, also planned to eliminate all the retired generals in the State. The document continued: "The Usama bin Ladin Network in cooperation with the Islamic Revolution Committee and Jasawa (Note: a name given to Hausa-Fulani Muslims in Jos. End Note) had mapped out grand strategy to carry out Islamic Jihad in Nigeria, especially in the Middle Belt areas of the country. The attack will be directed at Christians and Muslims who do not support the Jihad as is done in Saudi Arabia. This Jihad is already going on in Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and of course Afghanistan." The document added that "All terrorist groups in Nigeria should know that Al-Qa'ida is a world Islamic front for holy war against Jews and Christians...it is a global front to deal with the infidels."

Reactions: Old Fears Resurface

3. As quickly as the pamphlet circulated, so too did dangerous rumors, old mistrusts, suspicions, accusations, and counter-accusations between Muslims and Christians. Residents panicked, some traders refused to open their shops, and parents were afraid to send their children to schools. By Friday, 10 June, clouds of uncertainty hovered dangerously around Jos. It appeared that the fragile peace achieved in the state over the last few months could collapse.

4. Governor Joshua Dariye, who had been suspended in 2004 during a six-month State of Emergency declared in response to communal violence in the state (reftel), was understandably worried about the potential for the situation to escalate. He appealed through the media to Muslims and Christians to ignore the inciting publication, urging them to continue with their normal lives. Governor Dariye also assured the citizens of government protection. State police authorities quickly deployed personnel to strategic points. Governor Dariye summoned an enlarged security meeting where he met with religious and community leaders. Muslim and Christian leaders at the meeting reportedly disowned and denounced the publication, claiming "it was the handiwork of some faceless people opposed to the peace process" in the state. At the end, the leaders of each faith agreed to work together to maintain peace and order.

The Pamphlet's Source Identified

5. In spite of the scare, there was no report of violence either inside or outside Jos. According to government

sources, investigations by security agents traced the inciting pamphlet to an unnamed disgruntled Birom man in Jos, who was not happy with the creation of new chiefdoms that gave Hausa/Fulani a "particular district in Jos metropolis." (Note: The state government recently created some chiefdoms and districts to placate groups like Hausa/Fulani, the second largest group in the city after the Biroms. End Note.) The writer allegedly wanted to exploit the frosty relationship between the "indigenes" (Biroms & other ethnic groups, primarily Christian) and the "settlers" (Hausa/Fulani, mainly Muslim) to cause mayhem.

16. The government source also commented to us that prominent Biroms like General David Jang, the ANPP gubernatorial candidate who narrowly lost to Dariye in 2003, exploited the creation of the new chiefdoms to incite Biroms against the state government. Jang allegedly told his kinsmen that creating a district for the Hausa/Fulani in Jos is akin to surrendering the Biroms' traditional authority. "Jang's inflammatory remarks spurred such write-ups" as the pamphlet, the source further alleged; "You know the mere mention of Jihad or Al-Qa'ida would raise concern in majority Christian communities particularly where Muslims and Christians had fought each in the past." Other Plateau State government sources insisted the writer acted independently: "We discovered that Muslim leaders and Christians were not even aware of the contents of the document."

17. A source close to the Muslim leaders in Jos told Pol-Specialist that the publication was the "handiwork of some people that are interested in giving Islam a negative image." This source maintained the author of the document was not even a Muslim, much less representing an Islamic organization. "The publication was meant to cause confusion and anarchy in the state but thank God, residents are now cautious in dealing with these issues."

18. The Muslim source averred to us that the language and wordings used in the flyer could not have come from a Muslim, adding that the writer was not even conversant with Islamic culture. "There is nothing like carrying out an 'Islamic Jihad' in the Qu'ran," he claimed, then rhetorically asked, "Is there any 'Christian Jihad'?" He said the word "jihad" is commonly associated with Islamic societies but pointed out that the meaning of the word was flexible, sometimes referring to the inner struggle to live a better life and other times referring, erroneously he said, to the armed struggle against infidels. On the pamphlet's use of the name Al-Qa'ida, our source said the writer gave himself away: "Although I don't know how terrorist organizations operate, I believe if they have plans to attack any place, they will not normally give specific details."

Comment

19. The distribution of the pamphlet a few days before the closure of the U.S. Consulate in Lagos probably contributed to the media frenzy over the closure, but had only a localized effect on the Nigerian polity.

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